Oban Sonnets

'Back to Oban,
Where the Tourist loves to swarm.

PROFESSOR BLACKIE.

The Glory of Nature

in

The Land of Lorn

A Sonnet Sequence

By

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'Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
Come, hear the woodland Linnet,
How sweet his music! on my life,
There's more of Wisdom in it.

And hark! how blythe the Throstle sings!
He, too, is no mean Preacher:
Come forth into the Light of Things,
Let Nature be your Teacher. . . .

One impulse from a vernal Wood
May Teach you more of Man,
Of moral Evil and of Good,
Than all the Sages can. . . .

Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren Leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a Heart
That watches and receives.'

WORDSWORTH.

Proem

WORDSWORTH'S FIRST SONNET ON THE SONNET

'Nuns fret not at their Convent's narrow room;
And Hermits are contented with their cells;
And Students with their pensive Citadels;
Maids at the wheel, the Weaver at his loom,
Sit blythe and happy; Bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest peak of Furness-fells,
Will murmur by the hour in fox-glove bells:
In truth the Prison, unto which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is: *and hence for me*
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound,
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much Liberty,
Should find brief Solace there, as I have found.'

'At Oban all the world you see,
The doctor and the scholar,
The poor man with his penny fee,
The rich man with his dollar.

The dark Italian and the Greek,
The light-haired Northern nation,
In Oban all unite to seek
Their summer recreation.'

LOCAL RHYME.

NOTE.

The following Sonnets, which were mostly written or sketched on the spot, attempt to reproduce the Impressions of a delightful Week End Visit to Oban—in glorious weather—towards the end of June.

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I.

OBAN REVISITED.

OBAN, I love thee every year the more!
Beauty unrivalled still adorns thy Brow,
And decks thy peerless Form. I see thee now
The Aphrodite of our Western Shore.
The Graces bind thy girdle, as of yore,
And thee with Nature's choicest charms endow,
The Sun, the Sky, the Mountains fondly bow,
And Beauty's foam-born Queen anew adore!
Receive again the homage of my Heart:
I lay my Head upon thy heaving Breast,
And breathe thy fragrant Breath through fervid Lips.
Naught shall thy Beauty from my Eyes eclipse:
O give me Love's sweet guerdon—perfect Rest,
Nor from thee would my Soul in Death depart.

II.

OBE-AN. THE LITTLE BAY.

OBAN—how cosmopolitan, though small!
I hear the mingled Language of thy street,
Where Saxon, Celt, American, German, meet
And blend in happy Harmony withal.
I hear the Bugle from yon War Ship call;
I see the Steamers fret the Foam, all fleet
To bring quick throbbing Hearts, that eager greet
The fairest Spot that e'er held Soul in thrall.
Around thy lovely Bay the Hills arise,
Green, rugged, dotted o'er with happy Homes,
Mid waving Woods, in bland, soft, soothing Air:
And over all the smiling Summer Skies,
Bending in Love, where'er my footstep roams—
Sure Earth embosoms nowhere Nook more fair

III.

KERRERA.

O KERRERA, for ever in my view,
Art not ashamed thus always to intrude
Thyself, so plain—a low, green Island rude,
With working Farm, cows, sheep, a horse or two!
Beyond thee lies the great Atlantic blue;
Thou hid'st its Splendour, dear to Fancy's Mood;
Thy bold intrusion shuts out all the Brood
Of Hebrid Isles, poetic Dreamlands too.
But no! I wrong thee with vain, idle thought,
And now thy Perfectness more clearly see,
Thy faithful Service, thy meek, homely ways.
Thou bring'st to all the Good the Sages sought:
Content, Peace, Pureness, Health, are found with thee
A blessed Boon above the Poet's Bays.

IV.

THE COLOSSEUM.

STUPENDOUS Folly! When will Albyn learn
The Grandeur of her own Simplicity,
And cease with false, outlandish Shows to vie,
Nor mock our Caledonia, wild and stern?
Give me the hillside Wreath of Heath and Fern,
The crested Crag that dares to pierce the Sky,
Where free the wild Deer roam, the Eagles fly,
My Mausoleum lone—a grass-grown Cairn!
Rome never conquered Albyn; and shall now
Ye flaunt in mimicry that horror vile,
Where Forebears, butcher'd, bled beneath her smile?
No fit adornment this for Oban's brow—
The Colosseum! Hide it from my view,
Nor cruel Pagan Pride again renew.[1]

[1] 'The *Colosseum*, commenced by Vespasian, and completed by his son, was a memorial of the triumphant conclusion of the Jewish war [and the destruction of Jerusalem]. It was upwards of 180 feet in height, one-third of a mile in circumference, and capable of containing 100,000 persons' (Ramsay). In it the Gladiatorial Shows were held, and its Arena was continually stained with human blood.

V.

CLACH A' CHOIN. THE DOG STONE.

A LAND of Song, and legendary Lore,
Blind Ossian, its own Homer, echoing still,
In his own vivid speech, o'er Glen, and Hill,
And misty Isle, and round the surging Shore.
This Pillar-stone revives the Days of Yore—
Hark to the mighty Fingal's Horn! Deep thrill
The Woods. Proud Morven's Heroes gathering, fill
The scene. Bows clang; swift bound in mad uproar
Their thousand Hounds! But here, white-breasted Bran
Tied, barks, fierce-fang'd. The triple Slayer fell,
Snaps at the Thong, till him the King sets free.
Hurrah! The antler'd Deer far-off they see—
And, O the shout, the rush, the crash, the yell,
The wild Death Din, as on in Chase they ran![1]

[1] 'A deer fell by every dog; three by the white-breasted Bran' (Ossian).

VI.

DUNOLLIE.

WHAT Wealth of Woods! Laburnum's glowing Gold,
The whitest Hawthorn; Elder's cluster'd Bloom;
Rough Oak and smooth-boled Beech: in tangled gloom
O'er star-eyed Primrose, feathery Fern unroll'd!
Long let me stray amid such Charms untold,
And feed my deep Heart-hunger! Happy Doom
Proserpine thine, to burst thy Winter's Tomb
And cull all Flowers the Summer's Suns unfold!
But lo! the sinuous Shore and blue-eyed Sea
Disclose weird Ossian's mystic Land and Isles,
And Vision add to Vision, Charm to Charm:
And now from old Dunollie Castle, warm
With soothing Sunshine, all my Soul flies free,
And basks in Joy, while round me Nature smiles.

VII.

TWO FRIENDS.

A GARDEN rich with every Flower and Tree
 That Man may prize, and fairest Prospects round,
 All Beauty and all wealth of Sight and Sound—
God's dowry at the first, O Earth, to thee!
A Home of innocence it seems—all free
 From taint of sin, or pain, or blight of ground;
 No curse, no death, no hatred here are found;
The purest Sky is smiling over me!
And lo! emerging from a sunny Bower
 Advance two well-loved Friends, with radiant eyes
 And happy looks that find Love's World their own.
 More perfect grows the Scene. No longer lone,
 I gaze in wonder, asking Tree and Flower:
Say, do I dream, or walk in Paradise?

VIII.

NATURE POETS.

We dine, with frankest converse, true and kind,
O'er happy Friends rejoice, the Sad bewail;
And all let Natural Piety prevail,
Nor stain with false indulgence, Body or Mind.
Sweet Nature still controls us; more refined
Her tender sway, when Twilight flings her Veil
Soft, mystic, o'er the Scene, and one far Sail
Glints in the Bay, where breathes the Evening Wind.
And still our Talk responsive, long doth roam
With those who sang of Nature here, true, plain;
From Ossian's sounding Song and haunting Strain,
Scott's Maid of Lorn,[1] and Campbell's Fathers' Home;[2]
Here Wordsworth from the imprison'd eagle turns[3]—
But chief o'er all my Friend still praises Burns.

[1] Lord of the Isles, Canto I.
[2] 'Lines Written on visiting a Scene in Argyleshire.'
[3] Sonnet: 'Eagles, Composed at Dunollie Castle,' 1831.

IX.

TALK ABOUT BURNS.

My Friend is all in all for Robert Burns;
He finds him Poet, Patriot, Man, complete:
His Hero-worship with such Love replete,
No dearer Ashes lie in Sainted Urns.
When Henley on the Bard his Searchlight turns,
And coldly scans him down from Head to Feet,
My Friend's Blood boils, his Pulses wildly beat,
His Balaam wrath the keen-eyed Critic spurns!
Here, too, let Justice rule with equal sway,
Not blinded Prejudice, or false Applause,
Which never yet could further rightful Cause.
His own best Judge the Poet is to-day;
His Songs with all his better Self abound;
His contrite Heart his Name and Fame has crowned.

X.

MY HOSTESS.

My Friend and I can only talk in Verse,
 Glad Nature lifting us to Things unseen;
 He raves of Burns, I of Jeláleddín,
Ne'er weary when we their sweet Songs rehearse.
Her beauteous Art, of ours the sweet reverse,
 My Hostess plies, with deftest Hands, I ween,
 And patient Smile, nor will she intervene,
Her gentle Spirit to debate averse.
Ah, surely hers the Better Part! All vain
 Our wordy, fruitless Wrangling through the hour.
It brings no Peace, can no high Truth attain,
 Nor reacheth yet in Man God's deepest Dower.
'Tis only she hath won the real Gain—
 The Poetry supreme—Love's conquering Power.

XI.

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

A SOUTHRON Scot, yet full of Celtic Fire—
 Hear him, with Luggie's hectic Keats, arrange
 To force proud Fame, his Spur through toil, strife, change,
While ever brave, the noblest Thoughts inspire!
A Poet he, who sang in Nature's Choir,
 Clear, high, yet loved the far, the weird, the strange;
 Blame not this Phaeton flaming 'yond his Range,
Nor all the pathos of the End enquire.
Behold his clean, white Highland Home, perch'd high,
 Where, braving Blast and Shower, his dauntless look
 The World, the Flesh, the Devil, held in scorn!
Here, too, with burning Heart and Eagle Eye,
 He played the Man, and in his grateful Book
 Told all the Glory of the Land of Lorn.

XII.

PROFESSOR BLACKIE'S ALT-NA-CRAIG.

DEAR, unforgotten Blackie! Teacher, Friend!
I pause before this Threshold, once wide famed,
Whence many a wholesome Truth was loud proclaimed
In clarion notes which all must needs attend.
A Greek, aye young, who ne'er to power would bend,
Quick, ardent, keenly stung when Wrong was named;
No fool, though oft for Freak and Frolic blamed,
A merry Patriot-Poet to the End.
Thou taught'st me more than Greek; for I did learn
To love thy joyous, human, childlike ways,
And knew thy Heart the kindliest Genius rule.
Nor higher Fame could solemn Scholar earn
Than his, who with his breezy Highland Lays,
Left many a thoughtful page, of Wisdom full.

XIII.

A NATURE WORSHIPPER.

He stands upon a Westward Hill, and bends
With reverent Brow bared, to the setting Sun,
The glorious God of Day, whose high course run,
Eve round his Throne all hues of Beauty blends.
Gold, purple, saffron Rays in floods he sends,
A parting Benison to his Poet Son,
Whose Eyes responsive, burn with radiance won
From Beauty, that all visible Form transcends.
Dear Friend, I blame thee not for thy fond way,
Like Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, or Greek of old,
Thus worshipping the Beautiful, Love's Boon:
For Beauty is of God, yon Sun a Ray
Divine; and that its Joy be yet more told,
Still sweet and pure, thy gentle Lyre attune.

XIV.

ON GUARD.

THE Mountains girdle round this magic Land,
 Like giant Sentinels that guard a Queen:
 Strong massive Mull and Morven's dauntless Men,
That keep the Atlantic Fury in command.
Ben Nevis mightiest, rules the Northern Band;
 And round Loch Etive's rugged Shore are seen
 The stalwart Shepherds, watching all between,
Till stern Ben Cruachan frowns on Awe's dark Strand.
Tower'd Strength, immovable Titanic Forms,
 Deep sunken to Earth's Centre, stretching high,
 Through Cloudland, lightning-scarr'd, reared to endure.
They heed not how the howling Tempest storms
 Around them, guarding, in sworn Fealty,
 Sweet Beauty lying in Love's Arms secure.

XV.

A DREAM WITHIN A DREAM.

I DREAMED a Dream Within a Dream, and lay
 Watching the visioned Loveliness from far:
Three Heavenly Forms to dark Earth hied their way,
 Adown the slant white Beams of Morning's Star.
Not fired by Envy, like the wanton Three,
 Who strove on Ida for vain Beauty's Prize;
 Nor weakling Graces, with light languid Eyes—
Thalia, Aglaia, and Euphrosyne.
Faith eyed with mystic glance Night's fading Train;
 The breaking Orient drew Hope's eager Sight;
And Love with Look divine that dimmed the Twain,
 Shed o'er divided Men the rising Light:
But when Rose Dawn's light Touch my stillness broke,
I dreamed of Things that be—and, sighing, woke.

XVI.

DAWN.

Dawn on the Hills! Dear God, Thy own good gift,
A new-born living Day! It opes blue Eyes
All smiling, while black Night shrinks, hides, and dies,
And grateful Hearts their prayerful Thanks uplift.
New Life! New Faith! New Hope! New Love! The Rift
Of sever'd Days and Hearts, and all that cries
From Beds of Pain, these tender brightening Skies
Redeem in Love, and stayed is Death's dark Drift.
O Morning fair, from far-off Depths of Space
Thou com'st to chase the Darkness that did blind,
And all our Fears and Cares and Griefs allay:
And lo! to thee Earth turns her shadow'd Face,
Till all her gloom and dread in thee now find
The bright Foretoken of an endless Day.

XVII.

THE SEA.

THE Sea! The Sea! Behold she gleams afar,
Awaked to Gladness by the fondling Sun;
Smiles numberless, and Laughter's twinkling Fun,
Prelude Day's Joy, as fades the Morning Star.
The Islets dimple o'er her Face, nor mar
The flashing gleam that dancing Tides have won;
And now, usurping Night's dark Reign undone,
Love calls to Calm and Joy that know no jar.
O Sea! Thy Terror I have often known,
The stormy Rage of thy devouring Waves!
And well I know what Sorrows, dark and lone,
Lie deep enshrouded in thy cruel Caves.
Yet thou, too, knowest Love! O mystic Tone,
What foaming, frenzied Joy the kiss'd Shore laves!

XVIII.

WALK TO GANAVAN.

I WANDER on, through sweetest Morning Air,
 Where all is Beauty in the Earth and Sky;
 From Green below to purest Blue on high,
All things a World divinely made declare.
The Meadow Flowers that Kiss my Feet are fair,
 With Faces rapturous, upturned. Forth fly
 The twittering Birds, and whisper Music nigh;
They cannot sit and sing, such Glory there!
Beneath this mighty Crag I pause, and hear
 The Sea's soft Matin roll and swell below,
 And marvel how Man God's fair World has stained:
And yon far Mountains radiate Love, not Fear;
 Their Might proclaims last Triumph over woe,
 When Man shall find his Paradise Regained.

XIX.

GOLDEN FLOWERS.

WHAT Buttercups! And Daisies! Speedwells! Flowers
So common that we lose the wondering Sense,
And fall from all the ancient Reverence,
To careless gadding through the languid Hours.
But, O ye faithful, never-failing Powers!
Till now I ne'er have seen such Affluence
Of purest Beauty, in such Hues intense,
Yellow, and White, and Blue, from Heaven in showers.
I gaze on golden Splendour. Do I dream
Such Wealth of Beauty cometh from above,
Exuberance profuse of boundless Love?
The mild, full-uddered Kine so gladsome seem!
A fairer Sight did ne'er my eyes behold—
A very faery Field of Flower of Gold.

XX.

THE ISLANDS.

O Islands, tell me why ye dwell apart!
 Is it in self-sought Loneliness, all rude
 Your Spirit, seeking selfish Solitude,
No Pulse of Love yet beating at your Heart?
Feel ye no Yearning for your Kind, no Smart
 Of Soul, no Heart-ache, lone, wild, unsubdued?
 Or fear ye lest some Passion vain, intrude;
Or shrink in Dread from Love's more fateful Dart?—
A brighter Sungleam falls upon the Scene,
 And sweet the Maiden Isle, all radiant, smiles,
 While myriad Wavelets round her laugh and kiss:
 And then I knew the Islands' deeper bliss—
No selfish Pride, no Hate, no Gloom beguiles,
They, less apart, dwell lapped in Love serene.

XXI.

CHILDREN PLAYING.

O Children, playing happy on the Shore,
With white Feet dipp'd in Ocean's envious Spray:
Fear ye not thus to mingle in your Play,
With that vast Ocean, rolling evermore?
Doth not the Child Heart tremble at its roar,
As if a hungry Lion, near you lay,
Low growling; or when Lightnings blaze, and stay
The Thunder Crash, Earth trembling to the core?
Ye laugh, and dance, and shout! O happy Boy
Thou add'st a Gladness to Earth's fairest View,
And all my morbid, haunting Fear dispel.
Man's highest Thoughts unknown, ye act them well;
And from your Play the Truth I learn anew:
The Infinite is Love; true Life is Joy.

XXII.

THE LOBSTER.

I SAUNTER down the Merchants' Street, and pause
 Before the Fish Shop Window, clean and bright:
 What strange, quaint Forms are here displayed in sight,
Drawn from Atlantic Depths, through Death's dark Jaws!
But chief the living Lobster overawes—
 Its Coat of Mail, dread Grapples, formed for Fight,
 Fell stalk Eyes, lithe long Feelers, left and right—
And still it spits the spume, and clicks its Claws.
O Mystery! Did it come perchance to birth,
 When Love did sleep, and cruel Force, awake,
 In bitterest Scorn, of Love would Mockery make?
Nay! Individual Wrong is but of Earth;
 And now to make it perfect, I would fain
 Restore it to its native Depths again.

XXIII.

DUNSTAFFNAGE.

DUNSTAFFNAGE! Home of Kings in Days of yore!
I wander through thy ruined Halls and Towers,
And wonder how old envious Time devours
Man's strongest Work, and Fate's dark Ways explore.
Thy Stone of Destiny, with mystic Lore,
Proclaims it still that all the fleeting Hours
Work ever out a Higher Will than ours,
That onward, upward strives, from more to more.
'Twas here the Island Chiefs first ruled the Land,
Here where Columba, with his hallowed Fire,
And Trumpet-voice, crowned Nature's Work in Man
Here where the mad Macdougall's fiercest Band
Assailed the nobler Bruce, Kings' destined Sire,
While faithful Campbells fought in Freedom's Van.

XXIV.

THE BROOCH OF LORN.

THE Bruce swings high his terrible Battleaxe,
The Bravest of the Brave. His mighty Blows
Smash Targe and Helm; yet on, his furious Foes
Death-daring, swarm; nor their grim Grip relax.
The rugged Gorge, corpse-heaped, like smouldering Flax,
Doth smoke, from spatter'd Brains and Blood that flows:
And crawling near the writhing Kern's Death-throes,
The red-lipp'd Sleuthhound licks the Gore he tracks.
Ah! Lorn is down—beneath the Bruce's Knee;
Wild Slogans yell, while by strong Clansmen's Grasp,
Perforce the King is from his fell Foe torn:
A Flash, and—fall the leal MacKeochs three!
But left in Death's unyielding clutch, the Clasp
Of Bruce became the Legend Brooch of Lorn.[1]

[1] Lord of the Isles, Canto I., and Note.

XXV.

THE OLD TIMES AND THE NEW.

Say not, Old Times were better than the New,
That all these Centuries have toiled in vain,
That Man's long striving yet hath brought no gain,
Since Tears were shed, since Brother Brother slew.
We glorify a Past men never knew,
Forget the Slave and Savage, Myriads slain
To glut Revenge and Hate, the Want, the Pain,
The Wrongs the Many bore to exalt the Few.
Romance, O cease to revel in the Fray,
No more to brute Injustice Beauty lend,
Nor pine for Ages steeped in Blood and Night:
Their Best was worse than is our Worst to-day,
When every Wrong is doomed at last to end,
And all are free to know and do the Right.

XXVI

HAYMAKING AMONG THE HILLS.

How sweet it is to watch, in Sunlight clear,
The busy Haymakers athwart the Fields,
Reaping the Simple Growth the Upland yields,
And gathering all the Harvest of their Year!
Grey Sires and Matrons 'mong the Throng appear,
The lusty Mower swings the flashing Scythe;
Brave Lads and buxom Lasses, brisk and blythe,
With gleeful Toil the towering Hayricks rear.
A softer Sunlight fills the heath-crowned Glen;
A brighter Radiance floods the bending Skies;
A happier Hum swells Eve's low, dreamlike Sound:
The Year's glad Fulness joyeth Beasts and Men;
While, from a thousand Altars ranged, doth rise
The sweet-breathed Incense of the grateful Ground.

XXVII.

TWILIGHT THOUGHT.

I WOULD be one with Nature, as when young,
When my Heart beat with every Pulse of Day,
And dream'd, the whole Night through, a bright Array
Of lovely Forms that Beauty's Censers swung.
And I would hear through all the spaces rung
The Joybells of the World, when Life's new May
Puts on her Amaranth Flower, and glad and gay
Each Seed in Bud and Leaf hath found a Tongue.
And then the Loved and Lost shall live again,
And smiling Joy shall stay our Sighs and Tears,
While o'er all Highways sweep Triumphal Cars:
Then Truth and Right shall reap their golden Grain,
And Love shall crown the toiling, painful Years,
Sphere Music pealing down from all the Stars.

XXVIII.

NIGHT THOUGHT.

BENEATH the Weight of Worlds my Soul is crushed,-
A thousand Million Suns[1] flung forth in Space,
In fiery riot, rushing headlong, trace
Night's Phantom Glory, panting, passion-flushed.
And Earth lies cold and dark below,—all hushed
The joyous Voice of Day, her tear-stained Face
Averted from the Sun's last warm Embrace,
Despairing, fainting, as from Being brushed.
But now, O Soul, awake, thy Wings expand,
And soar through all the labyrinthine Maze,
And from these finite Realms thyself recall:
Thou dost unknown the subject Stars command;
At thee they all in Awe and Wonder gaze;
Thy Being Infinite transcends them all!

[1] According to Lord Kelvin.

XXIX.

DEEP NIGHT.

Hush! Midnight comes, and all the World is still,
 Weary and worn; the wheeling Planets pause
 Upon the blacken'd Sky; dark Night withdraws
The last dim Star, and works his woeful Will.
Day's fair Creation hath evanished, chill,
 Formless and void again, effaced; all Laws
 Of reigning Order, Beauty, Life, Free Cause,
Are gone, nor aught of Purpose high fulfil.
I lie enwrapped in Darkness, shrunk to one
 Dull beating Point, all blank; Will, Feeling, Thought,
 Chaotic, feeble, all distraught, ajar;
Life's Web of Deed and Fancy warps, undone—
 When lo! to leaden Eyes, unhoped, unsought,
 There glints a Glimmer of the Morning Star.

XXX.

THE FIRST SWALLOW.

I DREAMED that Life and Beauty ceased to be,
 As deadly Winter bound the Earth in cold,
 And wrapped Cimmerian Gloom in fold on fold,
O'er all the Year's bright forms of Flower and Tree.
I dreamed that Truth and Love had died to me,
 That Men were but the Slaves of Lust and Gold,
 And Women falsest Masks of painted Mould,
And I but longed for Death's Simplicity.
Then through my Window the new Morning burned,
 And a soft Whispering caught my waken'd Ear,
 And a swift Gleam sped through the brightening Air:
 I started at the sudden Vision fair—
 'Twas the First Swallow, fluttering, twittering near,
And all my Heart did thrill: Returned! Returned!

XXXI.

THE CEMETERY.

'Tis Sunday Morn, and here upon the Height,
This Home of Graves looks boldly to the Sky,
Lone, girt with greenest Hills, all Din away,
High Meeting point of Life and Death in Light.
How grand the Scene! How solemn, yet how bright!
Blue, bending Sky, soft murmuring Sea, the Sway
Of Heath and Hill and Glen, devoutly gay,
All lift our Souls up to the Infinite!
No Fear, no Doubts disturb our inner Calm;
At home and glad are we, with all the Dead,
Who lie in utter Peace beneath the Sun!
And Jesus, Plato, Wordsworth, Gray bring Balm
From deepest Wells of Thought, divinely fed—
May we thus sleep, too, when our Tasks are done!

XXXII.

THE TERROR OF DEATH.

Old Death hath lost his Terror and his Sting,
 Since I have learned that Life and Love are one,
 And that unloved God's Doing were undone,
Nor from His Work in me could profit spring.
I fear not Death, nor aught that Death can bring,
 Night's Hand unweaving all bright Day hath spun,
 Nor pall, nor clay, nor worm, nor vanish'd Sun,
Nor parting pain which yet my Heart may wring.
It is not Death, but loveless Life I fear,
 A living Death in mortal Nothingness,
 The weary Void of lone Futurity!
Then give me Death to quicken Life's arrear;
 And Time's Inconstancy itself shall bless,
 When Love is bound in Death's Security.

XXXIII.

A BLASTED TREE.

WHAT fatal Flash did scorch thy sturdy Bole,
And leave thee thus—bare, wither'd, bald, and gray?
Was it in blackest Night, or sulphurous Day?
Did Lightnings blinding burn, dread Thunders roll?
Thou—shivering, pale, and blasted—art the sole
Reminder of dark Death, in scene so gay,
Where every Flower is laughing in its play,
The lowliest adding Beauty to the Whole.
Embodied Pain still quivering in thy Trunk,
A Touch of Pity thrills me to the Heart,
And here recalls the Pagan tragic Moods:
The writhing Hercules, torn Titans sunk
In sunless Depths, and Philoctetes' Smart—
Ah! sure thou art the Marsyas of the Woods!

XXXIV.

NATURE'S LORE.

'SWEET is the Lore which Nature brings'![1] Well knew
The Poet Priest of Nature her sweet Ways,
And well he sang in clear sweet Strains her Praise,
With all her wondrous Beauty in his view.
Deep, too, and high, her Lore, divinely true
From Depth to Height; and high, too, were the Lays
Of him who, Seer-like, crowned his spotless Bays,
Within the inner Shrine, with Worship due.
But when 'the mighty Mother' doth 'unveil
Her awful Face,'[2] and show her Gorgon Form,
Our Spirits quail, her Beauty seen no more.
She bids Life, Death, Joy, Pain, in turn prevail,
Her Will supreme, sublime in Calm and Storm—
O Nature, teach me now thy deeper Lore!

[1] Wordsworth. [2] Gray.

XXXV.

THE EVOLUTION OF NATURE.

FROM dim Fire-cloud to loving, conscious Souls,
Through formless Void and Chaos, struggling Light,
Æons untold, march'd on with Thunder's Might,
The all-conquering Power, that still through all things rolls.
And every Sun between Heaven's utmost Poles,
And every Orb that roundeth Day and Night,
And every Mote that crowds all Depth and Height,
The plastic Power in every Pulse controls.
And fuller, fairer, freer Life was made,
Not less, but more, with every Wonder done,
Creator, Changer, Saviour linked in One.
And all the myriad Forms, in Time displayed
By conquering Love, unfold the Eternal Plan,
From nebulous haze to crowning, Godlike Man.

XXXVI.

GOD.

I SEARCHED in Self to find Life's secret Power,
The silent Purpose in the Maze of things,
But traced in vain the failing, fruitless Springs
Of Feeling, Thought, and Will—Man's natal Dower.
I viewed Society from my lone Watch Tower,
And marked the Glory, Power and Grace it brings;
But saw that Wit, and Wealth, and Fame take wings,
Earth's brightest Genius glowing but an Hour.
I turned to GOD, and Light flashed forth on All;
I found in chaos Order, Life in Death,
Deep Love in Strife, sweet Joy in parting Breath;
A Mystery woven through Earth's tangled Ball;
The meanest things in Human Life sublime;
Each Moment's Birth, Eternal Thought in Time!

XXXVII.

PULPIT HILL.

WELL named! But who shall fill that Pulpit? Whose
The Voice that shall proclaim God's Message there?
What human Speech could worthily declare
The Glory that doth all this World suffuse?
No other Theme could here the Preacher choose,
Did he Columba's Trumpet Tongue yet share,
That rang through distant Glens, his only Care
To cry that none might freest Grace refuse!
Long stilled that mighty Voice, now echoed faint,
But God's own Voice in Nature, now doth preach
The Truth, that lifts the Soul to Heaven above—
To us proclaiming Grace, as did the Saint:
Day unto Day here uttereth golden Speech,
And all its Sum is—Faith, and Hope, and Love!

XXXVIII.

SABBATH SUNSET.

LONG lingering Day, must all thy Beauty die?
Art thou, too, mortal, though divinely fair?
Will not harsh, hateful Fate thy frailty spare,
And leave thy peerless Rose to grace the Sky?
Still, still thou tremblest to the West, as shy
Through yonder purple pillar'd Hills to fare,
And pass within the Palace Gate, rich, rare,
Where waits the last deep mystic Destiny.
Dost fear to sink adown that glowing West,
As 'twere to Nothingness, through last Decay,
And all the bitter Pain of loveless Death?
Nay, let the Zephyrs quicken yet thy Breath,
And draw Night's Curtain, as thou sink'st away,
In Arms of Love, to sweet Eternal Rest.

XXXIX.

THE STARS.

THE Harbour Lights of Heaven! How through the Dark
 The Stars are lighting all the Void between;
 They throng in Crowds around Night's radiant Queen,
And tenfold multiply, the more I mark!
Innumerable, yet each Diamond Spark
 That glows and glitters in the gorgeous Scene,
 Its Station keeps, where Naught can intervene:
One Power makes each a shining, saving Ark.
So Souls, which no Man numbers, fill the Choir
 Of human Life, whom Leaves on Trees presage,
 And all the countless Sands on yonder Shore:
So, too, each Soul burns with self-centred Fire,
 A living Light, in Savage as in Sage,
 And still shall brighter shine for evermore.

XL.

MIDNIGHT.

O GARISH Day! how could I love you so?
With tender Night my Soul is now at home.
In perfect Peace, beneath her jewell'd Dome,
As never yet in thy gay World below.
Thy dazzling Beauty caught me, with vain Show
Of colour, pomp theatric, and the foam
Of churning Time; but now I gladder roam
Through Scenes eterne, in Beauty's starry Glow.
O leave me ever thus that I may hear
This sweet Star Music, ever and again:
It soothes my Sorrow, drives away my Fear,
And makes Love's Mystery and Purpose plain.
Great God! this Silence throbbing in my Ear,
Makes Thy Eternity Life's deathless Gain.

XLI.

A DREAM OF BEAUTY.

I FELL a-dreaming while the Night was young,
And boldly passed within the Golden Gate,
Where myriad mystic Forms were ranged in state,
With all the deep-eyed Poets who have sung.
I dreamed that Beauty's Hour of Birth was rung,
And all on strain with yearning Eyes did wait,
To see the Secret hid of ancient Fate,
And all the Doors of Mystery open flung.
And every Star flashed out its purest Ray,
And rhythmic Orbs danced round in tuneful Choir,
Till all that lived in Earth, and Sea, and Sky,
Gave up their fruitful Strength dark Death to slay;
And Space and Time brought forth in living Fire,
The Soul of Man, Love's Immortality.

XLII.

MORNING HEALTH.

THE Breath of Spring is sweet to frost-bit Earth:
 The freshening Shower is sweet to parchèd Ground;
 And sweet cool Eve to panting Day, with Sound
Of Beasts, and Birds, and Bees, and Insect Mirth.
Sweet to the Mother is her first young Birth;
 Sweet to the Father is a Lost Son found;
 And sweet to Toiler when the labouring Round
Of Days, brings restful Sabbath to his Hearth.
But sweeter far, and far above all Wealth,
 Is the fresh Flow in fever'd Blood again,
 With sovran, clear Possession of the Brain:
To feel once more the bounding Pulse of Health,
 When through the Sense the World of Beauty streams,
 And all the Fancy fills with Hope's new Dreams!

XLIII.

IN THE WOOD.

How grateful is the Shade! This leafy Wood
 Umbrageous, has for quiet Thought been made:
 Starred all around are rocky Dell and Glade
With Flowers, and swarm in Clouds the Summer's Brood.
Here teeming Nature makes it understood
 That Life and Beauty were not, without Shade.
 In vain, without the Dark, were Suns displayed,
Nor without Evil, had Man known the Good.
Dryad and Hamadryad flit around,
 And watch the Flowers, all sunken in Repose;
 The odorous Air is faint, nor stirs a Sound;
Soft winged, the fond white hovering Butterfly
 Scarce lights to kiss the red-lipp'd fragrant Rose,
 While slow the downy Sea Mew saileth by.

XLIV.

THE CUCKOO.

HARK! Yes! It *is* the Cuckoo back again,
And all our Hearts are stirred! Responsive rise
Our Voices, too! Glad all our looks; our Eyes
Keen scanning all the Air, search long in vain.
From South—from East—from North—from West, more plain
It comes, the Note so dear. The echoing Skies
Smile sweet. It plays at Hide and Seek, and cries:
'Cuckoo! Cuckoo!' In spring Cuckoo is fain!
Once more Schoolchildren, wandering through the Woods,
We shout, with Michael Bruce, and Wordsworth too!
The Child Heart triumphs over Life's hard Moods!
Once more young Dreams return and softly woo!
O Home! O Youth! O Tears! Fond Memory broods...
Till, roused, again I shout: 'Cuckoo! Cuckoo!'

XLV.

THE MOUNTAIN ASH.

THE Mountain Ash is fairest of all Trees
In Summer Woods. Had Thyrsis this but known,
His Song had triumphed in Love's higher Tone,
And Lycidas had kept his Heart at ease.
Lo! there she stands—a Bride in White! The Breeze
Scarce stirs her Virgin Veil, full o'er her thrown,
The Blossoms close caressing, proud to own
Her Witching Grace, her Quickening Smile to please.
The Thrush pours forth her Bridal Song; and, see!
Now claims his winsome Bride the Sun God brave,
And pours his golden Kisses on her Head:
May Autumn crown her with rich Rubies red,
Which clustering round her Brow, shall gleaming wave,
Aye fonder loved—our own dear Rowan Tree!

XLVI.

NATURE PERFECTED.

A LONELY House, begirt with Mountains high,
Where primal Nature holds eternal sway
In Shade and Shower and Sun, by Night and Day,
O'er Crag, and Stream, and Scaur, and Fell, and Sky.
Within, the same deep Power subdues the Eye,
In painted Floor, rough Wall, and bold array
Of Household Thrift, and in the peaceful Way
Of her, the Soul of this Simplicity.
Dear Matron, formed by sixty mirrored Years,
Let me behold thy Look of Calm again,
Such holy Beauty glorifies the Glen.
A new Earth round thy Being, bright appears;
Nature hath perfected her Work in thee,
And stirred new Faith, and Hope, and Love in me.

XLVII.

TOTALITY. ONE AND ALL.[1]

THAT 'All is One, and One is All,' stands clear:
The Mystery of the Infinite is plain
In Man and Woman, Birth, Death, Joy, and Pain,
In Beast, and Flower, and Stone, and rolling Sphere.
And 'All that was, and is, and shall be'[2] here,
No longer but a Riddle of the Brain,
Nor Space and Time unsolved Enigmas vain,
When One and All behind the Veil appear.
The Infinite is finite, else 'twere Naught,
The Finite Infinite in endless Change
Of All and One through Being's boundless Range.
The World with full Variety is fraught,
That Beauty, Truth, and Good may ne'er decay,
And Man and God be One and All for aye.

[1] Ἓν καὶ Πᾶν. [2] In Plutarch, De Iside.

XLVIII.

THE HIGHEST LOVE.

And now I know a Love which will not fade,
 High, wondrous, passing that of Womankind,
 More fixt than Fate, enduring with the Mind,
Serene, supreme, on Strength Supernal stayed:
A Love of Love's own Being full displayed,
 That holds embraced dark Death and Pain, entwined
 With Nature's Beauty, Ill with Good combined,
That gave and gives Itself to all Things made.
The Love that blends Sphere Music with Earth's jars,
 That all Man's Toil and Tears with Bliss hath crowned;
 Whose Glory glows where'er a Martyr trod;
Whose Faith and Hope make Graveyards holy Ground;
'The Love that moves the Sun and all the Stars'[1]
 And streams Eternal from the Heart of God.

[1] Dante.

XLIX.

A LASTING GOOD.

At Oban I have found a Lasting Good,
 Perfection in God's Work seen all around,
 As when, on making it, He smiled, and found
It realised His Thought and perfect stood.
Here still the Sea, the Rocks, the Flowers, the Wood,
 The kingly Mountains, with Crests golden crowned,
 The Harmony, the Life in every Sound
That breaks in Birth, unfold Creation's Mood.
And all show forth what deepest in Him lay,
 Through all Eternity—His Thought, His Love,
 Embodied Likeness here of Things above.
Thank God for every passing blissful Day!
 And may the Years bring Man's perfection due,
 To His All-Perfectness set here in view!

L.

FAREWELL.

OBAN, with beating Heart I say, Farewell!
 Yet sweet our Parting, dimm'd with no Regret
 But that we part. Nor do I now forget
The Visions which all parting Pain dispel.
No Verse could all the Good thou gav'st me tell—
 New Health, high Thoughts, sweet Converse far from fret,
 And deeper Joy!—God bless thee, Oban, yet!
And may His richest Favour with thee dwell!
May all thy Sons be brave, thy Daughters fair!
 May Peace, Goodwill, Prosperity bide here,
 And all be bound in one through Love divine!
May Reverence, Virtue, Truth perfume thy Air!
 And may, from near and far, each circling Year,
 New Pilgrims throng to thy dear, lovely Shrine!

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